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Maine's Rural Development Council

Testimony of Joe Oliva, Outreach and Communications Director of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 1730, An Act Regarding The Beneficial Electrification Policy Of The State

January 6, 2026

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology,

My name is Joe Oliva and I am the Outreach and Communications Director for GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

LD 1730 supports the “tools in the toolbox” approach to problem solving that is necessary for tackling some of the most pressing issues of our time – specifically, in this case, affordability and environmental protection. This bill makes clean energy ownership accessible to renters, low-income households, and families whose homes aren’t suitable for traditional solar, helping them lower electricity bills at a time of steep utility price increases.

Plug-in solar systems do not require placement on roofs, are much cheaper to purchase and install than traditional solar, and are designed to offset electricity use behind the meter and would not participate in Maine’s Net Energy Billing program. From an equity perspective, they enable participation from homeowners or renters who would otherwise not be able to clean energy generation.

We also know that our state’s households face some of the highest electricity rates in New England, and Maine households saw a 36.3% electricity price increase between May 2024–May 2025. Rising costs hit low- and moderate-income families, renters, and seniors hardest, with low-income families in Maine spending twice the recommended share of income on electricity. Plug-in solar provides immediate relief on electricity bills without state or federal subsidies.

As a matter of resiliency, rural and island communities that often face storm-related disruptions would enjoy another option for generating electricity and decrease reliance on costly diesel generation. At-home systems that include plug-in solar paired with small batteries can provide backup power during outages.

In the wake of losing federal solar tax credits, rooftop systems are even less affordable. LD 1730 ensures Maine stays on track with its climate goals by democratizing access to solar, lowering emissions, and expanding participation in clean energy, even without federal subsidies. We urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1730. Maine has a chance to lead in energy equity and resilience without subsidies, without fiscal impact, and with enormous public benefit.